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2021

Syllabus: Equity, Elitism, and Public Higher Education

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Equity, Elitism, and Public Higher Education

IDS 81660 / ASCP 81500 / MALS 78200 (3 credits)
Spring 2021, Tue 6:30-8:30PM (synchronous online)
CUNY Graduate Center

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Course website: <https://equity.commonsgc.cuny.edu/>

Note: *This syllabus is constantly evolving. Most recent update: Jan 13, 2021*

Course Description

Higher education can be a powerful engine of equity and social mobility. Yet many of the structures of colleges and universities—including admissions offices, faculty hiring committees, disciplinary formations, institutional rankings, and even classroom pedagogies and practices of collegiality—rely on tacit values of meritocracy and an economy of prestige. In other words, many academic structures actually undermine the values that we associate with possibilities for the most challenging and productive and diverse academic life. In this course, we examine the purposes and principles of universities, especially public universities; consider whether various structures advance or undermine those goals; and imagine new possibilities for educational systems that weave equity into the fabric of all they do. Our privileged methodology for considering the inequities and opportunities of university life will be queer of color and feminist materialist analyses, an interdisciplinary set of methods and methodologies that lend themselves to identifying, historicizing, and resisting institutional norms that produce queer-class-race-gender stratification in the university. Crucially, because these intellectual tools are themselves housed within institutional formations, they will be objects of our investigation as well as methods of analysis. CUNY—and more particularly, CUNY in the time of COVID—will serve as our chief test-object, as we consider the op-eds, institutional statements, and student experiences that have emerged since March 2020. Throughout, we will ask how our own educational experiences inform our work.

Required texts

All texts will be shared via DropBox or available through the GC library's online collections

- [DropBox for Equity, Elitism, and Public Higher Education](#)
- GC Library E-Reserves: <https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/er.php?b=c> (search for us by name; password MALSRogers or MALSBrim)

Recommended texts

See course Dropbox folder, "Recommended Texts"; we will invite you to add to this throughout the semester

Assignments

1. Low-stakes weekly responses on course website ([blog](#), audio, video). Choose formats you're comfortable working in and, sometimes, that you're not.
2. Student led discussions (see weekly schedule)
3. Final project (student designed, in consultation with Katina and Matt)

See our [Assignments](#) document and [Project Resources](#) for more details and ideas

Policies

Cite in whatever style you choose (footnotes, endnotes, in-text parenthetical citations, Chicago, MLA, APA, etc.) but you must cite somehow. (For specific assignments, we may specify appropriate citation styles.) See [Avoiding and Detecting Plagiarism: A Guide for Graduate Students](#), which includes the CUNY Policy on academic integrity.

CUNY Policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. The Graduate Center provides adaptive technologies and services for qualifying students. For more information, please see the section "Disability Services" on the page <http://www.gc.cuny.edu/Prospective-Current-Students/Student-Life/Resources>. Just as importantly, please consult with us during the first week of the semester if we can help meet your need for accommodations in this area. As instructors, we acknowledge that we are teaching in a highly unusual time and that students (and we ourselves) may need flexibility and support in order to participate fully.

To our auditors: We value the perspectives and experiences that you bring to the course, and we look forward to your participation in the synchronous class sessions and in various related forums and discussions. We do not expect you to submit work to be evaluated (e.g., responses, student led discussions, or the final project), nor will we evaluate such work. We do expect a good-faith effort at reading the assigned texts, attending class sessions, and engaging in class discussions. We are also excited for you to share your expertise around our core issues of higher education, race and class equity, and public engagement.

This syllabus is subject to change at the instructors' discretion.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Unit 1 -- The University: What and Why?

Week 1, Feb 2

Introductions

- **To do:** [Survey: About you/tech access](#) (complete before next class)
- [Zoom chat transcript from 2.2.21](#)

Week 2, Feb 9

COVID and CUNY

- CUNY Op-eds (See PSC-CUNY's "[Member-written Pieces](#)")
- [Higher Ed and COVID-19 in the News](#)
- [Tressie McMillan Cottom, *Lower Ed* \(NPR interview\)](#)
- *Optional reading:* [COVID-19 at CUNY: A John Jay class project](#)

Week 3, Feb 16

How Low Can Higher Ed Go?

- Cathy Davidson, *The New Education* ([ch2](#), [Ten Tips](#))
- Steve Brier & Michael Fabricant, *Austerity Blues* ([ch1](#), [ch4](#))
- Anthony Jack, *The Privileged Poor* ([Intro: "Can Poor Students Be Privileged?"](#))
- *Optional reading:* Jeffrey Williams, "[An Emerging Field Deconstructs Academia](#)"

Event of interest this week: Feb 18-19, free conference: [Graduate Education at Work in the World](#)

Week 4, Feb 23

Student Led Discussion

Event of interest this week: Feb 25, Open Knowledge Intensive Workshop Series: [Presenting Abolition Science Radio](#). [Register here](#)

Unit 2 -- Systems and Structures

Week 5, Mar 2

Brick Walls, Labor, and Slavery in the University

- Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included* ([Intro](#), [ch1](#)) (*optional:* [ch5](#))
- Harris, Campbell, & Brophy, *Slavery in the University* ([Intro](#))
- *Optional reading:* Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works* ([ch1](#))

Week 6, Mar 9

The Unspoken University

- Katina Rogers, *Putting the Humanities PhD to Work* ([ch2](#), [ch3](#))
- Julie Posselt, *Inside Graduate Admissions* ([Intro](#))

- Patricia Matthew, [interview on Brian Lehrer Show](#)

Event of interest this week: Mar 9, Open Knowledge Intensive Workshop Series: **Exploring and Expanding Open Pedagogy**. [Register here](#)

Week 7, Mar 16 **Student Led Discussion**

Unit 3 -- CUNY as a Case Study

Week 8, Mar 23 **Disciplinary and Its Discontents**

- Matt Brim, *Poor Queer Studies* ([Intro](#), [ch4](#); optional reading: [ch2](#))
- Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things* ([ch3](#))

Event of interest this week: Mar 9, Open Knowledge Intensive Workshop Series: **Open Knowledge and the Emerging Field of Black Girlhoods**. [Register here](#)

Week 9, Apr 6 **Black Study and the University**

- Toni Cade Bambara, *Realizing the Dream of a Black University* ([Intro](#))
- Fred Moten and Stephan Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* ([ch2](#))
- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "The Case for Abolition" ([The Intercept, part 1 & 2](#))

Week 10, Apr 13 **Student Led Discussion**

Unit 4 -- Imagining Something Different

Week 11, Apr 20 **Decolonizing Academia**

- Clélia Rodríguez, *Decolonizing Academia* ([ch1](#), [ch4](#))
- Smith, Tuck, & Yang, *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education* ([Intro to the series](#); Sandra Styres, "[Literacies of Land](#)"; Wilson and Laing, "[Queering Indigenous Education](#)")

Week 12, Apr 27 **Restructuring Educational Spaces**

- Guest: Bianca Williams CUNY Graduate Center, Anthropology; Faculty Lead, [PublicsLab](#)
- Guest: Kelly Baker Josephs, CUNY Graduate Center and York College, English and Digital Humanities; Academic Director, [Faculty Fellowship Publication Program](#)

Week 13, May 4

Abundance, Joy, Sustainability

- Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World* ([ch1, "Arts of Noticing"](#))
- Take a walk, read poetry, do something that brings you life

Week 14, May 11

Student Led Discussion

Week 15, May 18

Pedagogy Round Up

- Whom/where/how did you teach this semester?